

# PROGRAM EVALUATION

The Great Start Readiness Program (GSRP) evaluation requirements come from three sources: the Michigan Legislature in the law that establishes and funds GSRP, the Michigan State Board of Education in the criteria established for GSRP, and Michigan Department of Education (MDE) reporting guidelines.

GSRP utilizes information from screenings, ongoing observations, program quality evaluations, and insight from staff and parents to determine if the systems in place are working and how the program can best respond to the needs of enrolled children. The data-based approach allows for a more effective and efficient use of resources.

Early Childhood Specialists (ECS) evaluate the local program structure, processes, and outcomes to document program effectiveness; and to provide information for program improvement and accountability. The focus of a systematic approach to local data collection and data use is to provide continuous improvement feedback to staff and enrolled families.

The GSRP is required by legislation to provide for active and continuous participation of parents of enrolled children. Parents partner in evaluative activities as active decision-makers. Upon enrollment, parents must be informed that information about their child and family will be collected, reported, and analyzed to learn about the effectiveness of GSRP. Confidentiality must be maintained. A sample announcement to parents on program evaluation can be found in the resources for this section.

Each program must have a written evaluation plan that covers the implementation of all required program components. The annual program evaluation process includes the following requirements.

## Systemic Collection and Utilization of Data

Programs implementing Center-Based preschool utilize the *Program Quality Assessment* (PQA) to assess program quality. The PQA is minimally used three times each year. PQA Form A includes assessment of the Learning Environment, Daily Routine, Adult-Child Interaction, and Curriculum Planning and Assessment. Form A must be completed for each unique teaching team. One PQA Form B is completed for the program and includes assessment of Parent Involvement and Family Services, Staff Qualifications and Development, and Program Management. Program evaluation results are submitted annually to MDE for statewide evaluation of the program. More information on a systematic approach to use of the PQA can be found in the Early Childhood Specialist section.

Programs are required to conduct developmental screening and comprehensive child assessment. Data are reviewed to guide parent-teacher decisions about specific child interventions, the teaching staff's lesson planning, and administrative decisions about classroom- and program-wide improvement. Effective practices

include program-level aggregation of child assessment data three times per year. Please see the Child Assessment section for more information on child assessment.

Data are used to guide program improvement, monitor and support change elements, and share program quality information with parents, the Intermediate School District (ISD), and the community. A data analysis team led by the ECS includes parents, the principal and/or director, representation from teaching teams, and other specialists or stakeholders, as appropriate. A systematic approach brings the team together three times each program year. Program quality data from the PQA and child outcome data from child screening and assessment are aggregated and provided to the data analysis team in advance. Data sets should be prepared for the meeting in a reader-friendly format such as bar graphs, and without identifying features such as child names. The consistent session facilitator should be trained in team facilitation. Logistics such as the school-year schedule for meeting dates/times, places, and agenda may be prepared by the director or principal.

During the end-of-year meeting, the team:

- identifies the current level of performance across relevant indicators, evident strengths, and extraordinary accommodations for children/families (e.g., attendance rates, program settings and/or options, language groups, child, family or community risk factors);
- sets measurable goals and objectives to address classroom quality (Form A), agency quality (Form B), and child outcomes;
- agrees to eliminate what is not effective, for example, strategies which resulted in low-level *Program Quality Assessment* scores;
- addresses whether policies and procedures require revision; and
- inventories available program resources such as time, money, personnel, technology, curriculum resources, and local training opportunities.

After the meeting, the ECS arranges for meaningful professional development related to the goals. This could include a facilitated, rich staff discussion around a journal article, or contracting with a trainer from the curriculum or child assessment vendor, and will also include supports for implementation such as observation-feedback, peer modeling, coaching, and self-assessment. Curriculum materials should be available or readily created to implement the strategy. The action plans, including timeframes for progress monitoring, are shared with teaching teams. The ECS is responsible for monitoring fidelity of intervention and gains in child development. Measurement strategies are important because they address accountability to the continuous improvement efforts that are in place. Changes to agreed-upon strategies may at times require an additional team meeting. When progress monitoring is implemented, the result is a strengthened and individualized instructional program. Resources for this section include a sample evaluation plan and tools for helping with the analysis of data.

When this process is complete at the local level, the ISD Early Childhood Contact convenes the ECS team to aggregate and analyze the overall results for the year. This may result in a need for ISD-wide goals for improvement and professional development.

## Follow-up through Second Grade

Programs are required to develop a local evaluation component, including a follow-up study through second grade. Local longitudinal data collection facilitates communication between preschool and early elementary grades. Data collected provide information regarding the progress of children enrolled in GSRP through subsequent grades, referral to special services such as Special Education and Title I, school attendance, school performance, retention, and parent involvement. Reflection on longitudinal data provides preschool program staff with insight into the conditions of successful transition from preschool to subsequent grades and should be coupled with other program data to further program quality. See Resources for sample Follow-Up documentation and required Parent Notice of Program Measurement.

Local longitudinal efforts are enhanced by participation in the Michigan Student Data System (MSDS). The MSDS is the state education database and includes discrete information about individual children such as age, gender, race, ethnicity, and program participation. Those that provide preschool programming must identify enrolled children in the MSDS.

## National, Regional, and Statewide Evaluation

The purpose of the GSRP evaluation is to assess the extent to which programs contribute to children's development and readiness for school success. In 1995, the HighScope Educational Research Foundation was awarded a grant by the Michigan State Board of Education to design and conduct a longitudinal evaluation to assess the implementation and impact of GSRP. Reports at kindergarten entry, in the primary grades, at the first administration of the MEAP in 4th grade, and in middle school, have confirmed the initial findings of differences between the program group and the control group. These reports are all available at <http://www.highscope.org/Content.asp?ContentId=225>. The findings of the longitudinal study from 1995-2011 include:

- kindergarten teachers rated GSRP graduates as more advanced in imagination and creativity, demonstrating initiative, retaining learning, completing assignments, and having good attendance;
- second grade teachers rated GSRP graduates higher on being ready to learn, able to retain learning, maintaining good attendance, and having an interest in school;
- a higher percentage of 4th grade GSRP graduates passed the MEAP compared to non-GSRP students;
- GSRP boys took more 7th grade math courses than non-GSRP boys;
- GSRP children of color took more 8th grade math courses;
- significantly fewer GSRP participants were retained in grade between 2<sup>nd</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grades;
- more GSRP students graduated on time from high school than non-GSRP participants; and

- more GSRP children of color graduated on time from high school than non-GSRP participants.

In addition to the MDE reporting requirements, programs may be selected to participate in national, regional, and/or statewide GSRP data collection efforts. If selected, programs must cooperate with MDE, its designated evaluation contractor(s), and any of MDE's other research partners. Cooperation includes, but is not limited to:

- making classrooms available for observation;
- providing non-classroom space on site for child assessment;
- allowing administrators and staff to take time to complete surveys and questionnaires (via telephone, internet, paper, and/or in person; as necessary);
- returning completed surveys and questionnaires promptly and regularly;
- providing program information to the contractor, including children's unique identification numbers, as recorded in the MSDS;
- participating in project informational webinars, conference calls, and in-person meetings; and
- distributing parent information letters.